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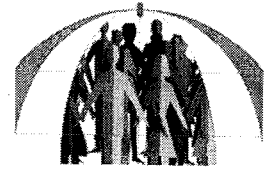


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Recommended Citation

Ganguly-Scrase, Ruchira; Vogl, Gillian J.; and Julian, Roberta, Neoliberal globalisation and women's experience of forced migrations in Asia 2005, 2-14.
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**Paper presented to the Social Change in the 21st
Century Conference**

**Centre for Social Change Research
Queensland University of Technology
28 October 2005**

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The world is now characterised by extensive and rapid movements of people. An increasingly important issue for industrialised countries, such as Australia, is the rising number of people who are becoming displaced within their homelands as a result of a multitude of interconnected factors. The majority of displaced persons and refugees in our region are women and children. Yet, they are severely underrepresented in refugee determination processes, claims for asylum and settlement. This paper will examine women's experiences of forced migration and the neo-liberal global context in which they occur. Over the past two decades the implementation of neoliberal policies in both the North and South have not only resulted in colossal displacements, but have simultaneously given rise to exclusionary politics. While globalisation conjures up a vision of a borderless world, as a result of free flow of goods, our paper will show that increasingly nation states have closed their borders to the displaced, emphasising the distinction between 'economic' migrants and political refugees. Based on recent fieldwork among internally displaced women and cross-border forced migrants in South Asia, our paper will map out the ways in which the aggressive pursuit of neo-liberal agendas and the rise of exclusionary politics, based on national security and border protection, result in greater social inequalities for women. By focusing on the ways in which women confront and interpret the commonalities and differences of dislocation, our paper will evaluate the contemporary applicability of the concept of "refugee" in postcolonial states and highlight the significance of gendered displacements.

Keywords: Forced migration; Gender; Neoliberalism

Neoliberal Globalisation and Women's Experiences of Forced migrations in Asia

In this paper we draw attention to the weakness of the concept of refugee in contemporary postcolonial contexts by highlighting the gendered complexities of cross-border forced migration and internal displacement. The persistent dichotomy of internal and external displacement, and the failure to classify as refugees those who have not crossed an international border, despite the escalation of their numbers in developing countries in the Asian region exemplifies, the Eurocentric nature of refugee discourse. The complex processes of decolonisation and increased integration of the world economy have set in motion large-scale population movements that render meaningless distinct categories of dislocations. Therefore, we emphasise that the boundaries of poverty-induced internal migration and forced international displacements often intersect and are blurred. There is an urgent need to explore women's shared experiences as refugees and economic migrants, and also to show how these experiences connect with globalisation and neoliberalism. Our observations are based on ethnographic research carried out in the border regions within South Asia and documentary analysis of secondary data on South East Asia. Intensive fieldwork among the displaced enabled us to challenge the conventional epistemic notion of what it means to be a refugee, allowing us to present the life worlds of the researched as active agents within our study rather than passive victims. We followed Sorensen's (2003a:15; 2003b) ethnographic approach to deconstructing pre-existing categories of displacement by showing which aspects are relevant on the ground. Documentary analysis of official sources and secondary data strengthened our understanding of the macro political economic and historical forces that have shaped the experiences of forced migrations.

Globalisation

Castles (2003:21) states that forced migration is a fundamental part of globalisation and thus cannot be studied in isolation. Refugee situations are not a string of disconnected humanitarian emergencies and are connected to a wider social, political and economic context (Castles, 2003:30). Castles (2003:27) states that by considering the broader structural causes of forced migration, one can generate explanations both for why forced migration has risen in the South and for why Northern countries have responded similarly to the plight of refugees and asylum seekers. As Castles (2003:17) states the terminology North and South refers to a social rather than a geographical divide. Within this paper, the South refers to 'less developed' countries in Asia and the North refers to 'developed countries', particularly the USA, and the institutions which it dominates such as the World Bank, which have the power to impose neo liberal policies on countries in Asia. Women's experiences need to be explained in the context of the characteristics which depict globalisation at present.

Globalisation is characterised by elements which are both neoliberal and neoconservative. They share more similarities than differences (Steger, 2005:17). Both neoconservatives and neoliberals emphasise the significance of free trade and markets. Neoconservatives, however, also combine this attitude with a belief in the regulatory actions of governments and in the protection of their citizens, in terms of both security and traditional values. Indeed, as both Bryan (2002) and Peck (2004) argue, neoliberalism does not involve the simple application of free market philosophy, but is based also on social conservatism and increasing preoccupation with social control in areas of law and order and border

protection (Peck, 2004). Mitropoulos (2001:54) shows that while globalisation conjures up a vision of a borderless world, as a result of the free flow of goods, globalisation is in fact about borders which are both permeable and exclusionary.

Global elites in the North present globalisation as if it were the answer to economic growth and prosperity for all (Steger, 2005:21). Yet, in reality it has increasingly resulted in wealth and power being concentrated in the hands of very few (Taran, 2000:35). Structural adjustment programmes introduced by elites in the North into the South have resulted in a reduction of public spending and employment, which has led to massive gendered displacement.

International migration is a fundamental component of this relationship between North and South (Castles, 2003:18). Within both North and South, the dynamics of inclusion and exclusion result in greater social inequality in the South and lead to certain areas of deterioration in the North. These dynamics result in both conflict and forced migration, as well as a blurring of the difference between various categories of migration. Failed economies generally lead to weak states and human rights abuses. Many migrants and asylum seekers have numerous motives for moving and it is unfeasible to separate economic and human rights motivations.

Rigid Categorisation and its Consequences for Displaced Women:

Historically, the conceptualisation of the displaced person can be traced to the inception of the UN Convention of 1951 within the context of post-war reconstruction. Here, the definition of a refugee was characterised as a person who, "owing to a well founded fear of persecution for reasons of race, religion, nationality, membership of a particular group or political opinion, is outside the country of his nationality and is unable, or owing to such fear, is unwillingly to avail himself of the protection of that country" (Article 1, United Nations Convention Relating to the Status of the Refugee, 1951, cited in Loescher, 1999:234). This definition is both antiquated and insufficient in the twenty-first century (Surhke and Newland 2001:284). With its focus on individual persecution and sovereignty, this notion is Eurocentric and reductionist (Malkki, 1995; Loesher, 2001). 'Economic migrants' are not recognised as *bona fide* refugees because they are assumed not to suffer from 'persecution', but are said to have an element of choice in their movements. The global community eschews responsibility for the internally displaced, under the guise of observing state sovereignty. Forced displacement has only recently been perceived as a human rights problem (Stravropoulou, 1998: 519). Although the internally displaced suffer the same material deprivations as the externally displaced, they are largely denied access to international assistance (Toole and Begikhani, 2000). However, the onus for this crisis must be borne by the international community, given that in some parts of the developing world 'proxy wars' waged by the superpowers of the Cold War (Cohen and Deng, 1998), precipitated vast internal displacements. Conventional demarcation between displacement due to coercive measures (war, direct persecution, famine) and displacement due to economic reasons (poverty) glosses over the fact that both categories of displaced persons often suffer under the same abject conditions after relocation (Hein, 1993: 47). These aforementioned mass persecutions and displacements exemplify the limitations of conventional refugee discourses that are predicated on individual persecution. Arguably, the refugee paradigm also excludes the experiences of women in forced internal and international migrations.

Jagger (2002:123) shows that since women make up the majority of the world's poor, neo liberal policies have been particularly detrimental to women, with a reduction in social programs being the most visibly gendered aspect of these policies. Reductions in health services have led to higher maternal mortality. The unpaid labour done by women has increased as it is women who have had to take up the work done previously by particular social programs since ideologically both in the North and the South, it is women who are seen to be responsible for the care of children and other family members. This increase in unpaid work in the South has resulted in girls being taken out of school to help their families. The introduction of school fees has further led to education becoming inaccessible to girls. These changes have both increased the impoverishment of women and made it difficult for them to find work. Furthermore, neoliberal prescriptions have been often accompanied by aggressive border protection policies. In postcolonial states the resultant impact has affected women even more adversely than men. In the making of post colonial nation states boundaries were drawn arbitrarily through ethnic, religious cultural and economic communities. Homogenisation underpinning nationalist ideologies also led to the creation of marginalised and displaced 'minority' groups who did not belong in the nation state. Tensions and contestation over artificially constructed boundaries have continued since simple movement of populations in border regions can become an illegal act. However, the pursuit of market liberalisation does not seem to be leading to greater tolerance of ethnic and religious differences (Hann, 1997). On the contrary, border controls are being vigorously reinforced to keep alien *others* out. Most undocumented forced women migrants we spoke with reiterated their inability to secure asylum as they did not meet the official's notion of who ought to be considered a genuinely persecuted individual.

Women and forced migration: Similarities and Differences between refugee women and poverty induced displaced women

Eighty per cent of refugees and internationally displaced people are women and children (Rodriguez 2003:6). Women experience gendered forms of violence, such as rape, the fear of rape, body searches, enforced pregnancy, slavery, sexual trafficking, enforced sterilization, and infection with sexually transmitted diseases and AIDS, as well social stigmatisation once they have been sexually assaulted (Rajasingham-Senanayake, 2004:149 and Rodriguez, 2003:1). The infection of women with HIV/AIDS leads to local discrimination against these women and disqualifies them from resettlement in many countries, including Australia (Bartolomei and Pittaway, 2003:88).

Children's survival often depends on a women's ability to adapt to impoverishment. A woman fleeing from hardship, violence and war faces the threat of rape by the border guards, is encumbered with the task of childcare, cleaning, cooking, collecting fuel and water. The collection of fuel and water often leads to further violations of her body and soul (Samaddar, 1999:41). During fieldwork we found that women are expected, even under the conditions of forced displacement, to take care of the family and to uphold cultural traditions. This expectation holds even when women are abandoned by their husbands and thus denied traditional protection, left without a home, possessions or work, and without any family or community support.

Samaddar's (1999:40) findings on South Asia shows that women are the most abused refugees and the most unwanted migrants. The sexual victimization faced by women is the most gender specific human rights violation of forced migration. These abuses violate both women's rights to their own bodies and to their physical and psychological well-being. Women do the most low skilled, least paid, most abused and dishonourable jobs. In

displacement the loss of property and work, physical injury, separation from family, and issues of protection and security are all more serious for women (Roy, 2002). As a result of the economic crisis which results from war, there is no money for girls to go to school. A lack of education makes the trap of sexual violence, such as sexual slavery, trafficking and prostitution much harder to escape (Britain, 2003:44). In flight, women are subject to abuse, rape, injury and death in greater numbers than men (Kaapanda and Fenn 2000; Ivekovic 2000). Women experience greater poverty, health risks, have more mental health problems, receive less information, fewer work opportunities and fewer opportunities for education and training than men when relocated (Hans 2000; Kaapanda and Fenn 2000; Waas J, van der Kwaak, A and Bloem, M 2003:330). In addition, women frequently face social stigma if they are living alone, or accusations of promiscuity (Qadeem, 2003).

There are close similarities between female refugees and poverty-induced displaced women (Segura-Escobar, 2000:107). Our research in South Asia affirms this. In women's narratives of displacement the boundaries of the economic migrant and the political refugee became blurred. For example, the sentiments of Hindu women refugee fleeing persecution from Muslim Bangladesh were typified by comments such as:

...Then after the trouble, we came here because of persecution by the *miyas* (Muslims) It is because of poverty that we had to leave...It is because of persecution and poverty that we had to leave, I mean if we could not gather grains, then how can we bring up our children?" (40-year-old married woman from Bangladesh, living as an illegal migrant in India).

This may be contrasted with routine experiences of poverty induced internally displaced women in India who unambiguously explained that poor economic circumstances compelled them to migrate from villages seeking better employment opportunities in the city:

In the village there was no rain, there was drought and poverty. So we came to Kolkata (Calcutta). (40 year old, deserted woman, migrated from a village in West Bengal)

We need keep in mind that both groups of women are located in a region where at the stroke of the mid-night hour in 1947, an artificial international boundary was created. Subsequently, while displacement within the national boundary has become acceptable, the movement of people across the border is rendered illegal. Yet, both groups continue to suffer from economic deprivation and policies that systematically exclude women from outside assistance. It has also been argued that female labour within impoverished communities is taken for granted and capitalized on. In both situations, female labour doubles, yet labour within the home is taken for granted within the global market system (Arora, 1999:281). In the specific case of structural readjustment in India, job loss for men also entails an extra burden for women, who have to provide for their families (Arora, 1999, Okin, 2003). Economic policy, influenced by global market forces, often ignore women's specific needs and experiences (Okin, 2003:283).

A study undertaken in the mountain province of Cordillera in the Philippines illustrates the way in which the issues surrounding forced migration are multifaceted. This case study illustrates the fact that displacement due to poverty is no less valid than displacement due to war or persecution. Moreover, the study shows the way female identity is mediated and contested through the new forms of work women have to perform through migration (Mckay, 2003:290). In Cordillera many have to leave the area to find work, as subsistence farming is not sufficient to meet basic needs. Here, women gain a newfound sense of identity through overseas domestic work and hence by providing for their families. McKay's

(2003:258) research demonstrates the way female identity and experiences are changed by migration and the way women can also be empowered through certain forms of displacement.

This parallels with a similar study conducted in rural Thailand where young women are seen as a major source of remittance for poor communities (de Jong and Richter, 1996). As de Jong and Richter (1996:752) assert, single women who migrate in order to assist their impoverished families can generate a greater sense of empowerment for themselves, particularly since movement to help one's family is valorised in such communities.

Similarities between female refugees and poverty-induced displaced women are also evident when examining the way in which aid organizations liaise with male figureheads who are often unaware of specific female requirements (Okin, 2003:280). Similarly, in both forms of displacement, which usually entails scarcity, women are generally given fewer resources, such as food (Okin, 2003: 281). In displacement caused by development projects, cash compensation is given to men and women are doubly disadvantaged in that they lack economic capital in addition to land and skills they had developed particular to that locality (Arora, 1999:345).

Women: the invisible refugees

The stereotype of a 'refugee' conforms to the Cold War image which is predominantly male. The language of the UN Convention on Refugees is gender blind. That is, it does not refer to females, nor does it specifically recognise persecution on the grounds of gender. Although, for example, rape has been recognised as a war crime, the Refugee Convention does not identify rape as sufficient ground for refugee status. However, Haines (2003: 327) argues that:

The failure of decision makers to recognize and respond appropriately to the experiences of women stems not from the fact that the 1951 Convention does not refer specifically to persecution on the basis of sex or gender, but rather because it has often been approached from a partial perspective and interpreted through a framework of male experience.

In 1985 the Executive Committee of the UNHCR (EXCOMM) recognised women refugees and asylum seekers as a 'particular social group' under the terms of the Refugee Convention, but this is not always followed by either member or non-member countries.

Women have often been relegated to the periphery in mainstream refugee debates. Arguably, women have been excluded from both the internal and external displacement debates due to the very definition of what it means to be a refugee. Recent literature has shown that women are systematically excluded from refugee debate due to the specificity of female experiences, despite the overrepresentation of women in refugee statistics (Boyd, 1999, Macklin, 1995, Cohen, 2000). It has been contended that the UNHCR definition of the "refugee" is simultaneously individualistic and presumptuous in its intimation that violations must be specifically committed by the state (Boyd, 1999:8). Boyd suggests that this definition privileges the public side of public/private divide by focusing on the actions of the state. This definition "fails to acknowledge forms of persecution that occur in private settings" (Boyd, 1999:8). As women are more likely to be persecuted in the private sphere, they are less likely to be officially seen as refugees.

It has been argued that refugee law is intrinsically gendered and subsequently needs to be altered (Macklin, 1995:218). Boyd posits that female persecution, eventuating in displacement, can be conceptualised in two ways. Firstly, a woman can be persecuted as a woman, not because she is a woman. This means that the form of persecution is gendered, such as in the case of rape. Similarly, a woman can be persecuted because of her gender or because she has broken social mores pertaining to her gender (Boyd, 1999:9). This distinction is made clearly by Haines (2003) who describes the former form of persecution as gender-specific and the latter as gender-related. Citing Crawley, Haines (2003: 336) also describes persecution by sexual violence as a weapon of war, when the "...violation of women's bodies acts as a symbol of the violation of the country." Similarly, gender inequity and stratification can be reproduced in places of relocation, where women generally possess less education and fewer skills than their male counterparts, and hence lack bargaining power in the community (Boyd, 1999:12). Another important aspect of this analysis is the way in which women's bodies often become sites of contestation in relocated communities. The degree to which women are controlled is often a symbol of reconstructed patriarchal authority in many displaced communities (Ganguly-Scrase and Julian, 1997: 435). Gender prejudice is endemic to some UN practices (Cohen, 2000). Many officials and field workers dismiss rape in UN-run camps as "regrettable but unavoidable" (Cohen, 2000:73). This demonstrates the way in which women's experiences are dismissed or trivialised in refugee camps, despite the fact that many women regard rape as a form of torture. In general, the impact that rape has on women is also trivialised by officials, who fail to see its long lasting psychological, spiritual and physical effects, particularly in societies where female sexuality is strictly regulated.

The status of women is culturally variable. Women's experiences in displacement differ from the experiences of men because of, firstly, real physical difference and, secondly, gendered difference. This is reinforced by the patriarchal language of the United Nations where the text of the Refugee Convention does not refer to women in its policy and where in practice violence against women is regarded as a 'natural' circumstance of war and conflict. Rape, for example is recognised as a war crime, but is not universally accepted as a ground for refugee status, as noted above. Pittaway (2002) illustrates the illogicality of this with the example of a woman who was not accorded refugee status because she had been raped although her husband was because he had been forced to watch her being raped.

Within refugee and displacement camps, women are the 'invisible' refugees who are not consulted in the planning and designing of programs which impact on them. Women represent 80 per cent of health care workers in refugee camps, yet they have little say in the construction of national and international policies. Women often do not get a fair share of food, water and shelter allocations, with resources often being given to male heads of households (Samaddar, 1999:40, Rodriguez, 2003:2). Binder and Tasic (2005) argue that women are often not acknowledged as an identifiable category in national asylum policies and are often viewed as the companions of male asylum seekers. This can be evidenced in national refugee policies in countries in the Asia pacific region, such as Australia and India.

According to McKay (2003:444) changes to the Migration legislation Amendment Act in 2001 (MLAA) in Australia discriminate against women. Changes to this act under the Howard government have meant that individuals who are denied status as refugees are unable to make further claims individually or as a group. This means that women and their dependent children may be prevented from making claims. Any family who arrives in Australia must put in an application for a permanent protection visa (PPV). Each family member is then recorded as a dependent on the form of the person, who is usually the

male head of the household. Each member can then make his/her claim separately by filling in a section further on in the application under the family unit section. While gender guidelines given to officers at the Department of Immigration and Multicultural and Indigenous Affairs (DIMIA) highlight the social and cultural barriers which may prevent women from putting in their own applications or having their experiences put down on applications, these are often ignored. McKay (2003:445) claims that often male heads of the household and even women themselves pay scant attention to the way in which women's experiences of persecution can amount to a successful claim.

As a result of the MLAA, if a women asylum seeker is not interviewed before the principal applicant's claim is denied, then there is a large possibility that her claim will not be listened to at all. In contrast to how the application process is constructed in Australia, in both Canada and New Zealand all family members have to complete individual application forms explaining why they cannot return to the countries from which they have originated. In New Zealand, all family members are interviewed with women being interviewed individually by a female and with a female interpreter, if they wish. By taking this approach all family members are given the opportunity to speak about their experiences (McKay, 2003:447).

Asha Hans (2003: 379), the well-known South Asia Refugee Rights activist and researcher on humanitarian protection, states that "gender consideration was never an important component of India's refugee policy". Despite the fact that displacement and asylum is a gendered experience, women are seen as "objects not subjects of humanitarian planning" (Hans, 2003: 380). Subsequently, as Das (cited in Banerjee 2002: 9) has highlighted, the "South Asian attitude to women has been guided by 'mystified notions of chastity'" which leads to the notion that women in South Asia belong to their own communities. He argues that when women are displaced in large numbers the focus shifts "from the individual woman to their communities" (Das in Banerjee, 2002: 9). Banerjee asserts (2002: 9) that guidelines for the protection of women are often left to individual governments to put into practice and that, where governments are gender blind, these guidelines are not put into practice. Organisations such as the UNHCR often disenfranchise women by relegating them to the status of victim, by giving them little say in how camps are organised or run, by denying agency to women in work, or access in and out of camps, and by making decisions regarding relocation without giving women a choice or the opportunity for some input into such decisions (Banerjee, 2002: 9-10).

Forced migration and exclusion: nation states and border control policies

Evidently, forced and economic migrations are closely related and often interchangeable expressions of global inequality and societal crisis (Castles, 2003:17). It is through the deconstruction of various bureaucratic categories that both the diversity and similarity of people experiences can be exposed. According to Sivanandan (2001:87) the distinction between political refugee and economic migrant is a false one and is vulnerable to differing interpretations depending on the interests of who such categories serve. It is the interests of the powerful that have resulted in the blurring of these categories. Even when experts have examined transnational migration with a gender lens and note the increasing 'feminisation' (Tyner 1999) their attention on the productive sphere and the social production of gender (cf Glick Schiller et al. 1995) have left out the complexities of different and gendered experiences of migration in an overall theoretical frame. Neoliberalism with its focus on structural adjustment programs resulted in reduced social spending, leading to

the impoverishment and eradication of social, welfare and educational provisions to people in developing nations. Resistance to poverty cannot be separated from political resistance and persecution (Lahiri-Dutt and Samanta, 2004), thus turning the political refugee into an economic migrant. In addition, millions of people become displaced each year as a result of development programs (Kothari, 1999; Robinson, 2003). It is normally difficult to tell the difference between environmental, economic and political factors and therefore the category, environmental refugee, can obscure the very complex reasons underlying environmental disasters. Often the underlying causes of such forced migration might be found in the chosen path of development followed by the state (Mishra, 2004).

According to Castles (2003,13) discussions which focus on forced migration are essentially linked to the concerns that nation-states have with their national security and border control. Recent developments in industrialised countries indicate that governments are gradually restricting entry (see Hayter, 2003:8-9 for example) of immigrants and asylum seekers. This is most apparent in the border security planning of Western countries such as England, the nations within the European Union, Australia and North America. In line with the establishment of border control policies in the North, Australia has developed policies which are increasingly exclusionary. Our examination of Australia's relationship with Indonesian authorities in terms of border control has two purposes. Firstly, it highlights the complexity and interrelatedness of the factors which lead to displacement, thus emphasising the need to deconstruct the bureaucratic categories which are now used to characterise refugees. Secondly, it provides evidence for the increasing importance that Australia has placed on border control and national security policies. Australian Prime Minister John Howard has developed a very firm connection between sovereignty and exclusion in present asylum policies. As has been demonstrated above, these policies have had an even more adverse impact on women than men.

With the exclusion of those who have become displaced as a result of the Tsunami which is conservatively claimed to be around 500,000, Indonesia has more than 1.3 million internally displaced persons (IDP's) (Refugees International, 2004 and Refugees International A, 2005). Similarly, there are estimates that nearly 260,000 East Timorese fled or were forcibly removed to West Timor following the 1999 vote for independence (UNHCR News, 2005). Several factors such as democratisation and governmental reform, including decentralization, whereby extensive authorities have been formally devolved to local governments, the separation of the Indonesian Military from the Police, continuing separatist movements and civil conflict, transmigration policy, and more recently several natural disasters, have all contributed to the ongoing situation of these displaced people (USAID, 2004; Crisis Group Asia, 2004:10). All of these factors have prompted many humanitarian organisations to call for more concerted efforts by the Indonesian Government to address the needs of these people. However, just how the Indonesian Government manages these displaced persons, illegal immigrants and refugees appears to be an increasingly complex issue. Although formally the Indonesian Military (TNI) has the responsibility for external defence and the Indonesian National Police (INP) for internal security, realistically this division of labour is indistinct and overlaps are common (UNHCR Country of Origin and Legal Information, 2005).

The Indonesian Government also has an Immigration Office as part of the Justice Ministry and there have been recent developments in 2004 whereby Indonesian customs and immigration have been given specialised intelligence functions in order to help track individuals involved in transnational crimes, such as terrorism and trafficking in drugs and people (Crisis Group Asia, 2004:13). Similarly in Australia, it is DIMIA that has a lead role in dealing with illegal immigration. However, it is the AFP whose responsibility it is for the

investigation of organised crime involvement in people smuggling (Australian Federal Police, 2000). This role is a relatively new development that was initiated in late 1999, following amendments to the Migration Act and an increase in undetected illegal immigrants arriving in Australia (Australian Federal Police, 2000).

A media release from the Minister for Justice and Customs in February 2002 stated that over 3,000 potential arrivals to Australia had been intercepted and arrested by Indonesian authorities since February 2000 when cooperative arrangements between Indonesian authorities and the AFP were established (AFP Media Release, 2002). Indonesia is an important focus of DIMIA's efforts in relation to people smuggling and irregular immigration and, as such, DIMIA is assisting Indonesia to develop and strengthen Indonesian border control systems (Commonwealth of Australia, 2004:54). DIMIA also have cooperative arrangements with Indonesia referred to as the 'regional cooperation model' whereby potential illegal immigrants in Indonesia are intercepted and handed over to the International Organisation for Migration for their care and accommodation while the UNHCR determines if they have any protection claims (Commonwealth of Australia, 2004: 54).

Australia's anxiety over asylum seekers is, according to Devtak (2004:103), consistent with Australia's past fear of otherness. The first act of Australia's new Federal government in 1901 was the 'Immigration Restriction Act'. The White Australia policy allowed governments to create a powerful and lasting discourse in Australia which has both been exclusionary of foreigners and established a myth of Australia as being encircled by threatening races (Dektak, 2004:103).

Conclusion

As neoliberal policies become systematically implemented and insecurities increase in the region, Australia is bound to confront problems associated with displacement. Rather than treating the outcomes of displacement as a series of humanitarian crises as exemplified in recent responses to the Tsunami or civil wars, deeper understanding of the nature of forced migrations is necessary. By analysing the complex links between developed and developing countries with reference to internal and external migration, our research has attempted to provide an enhanced understanding of the region in which Australia is placed. According to Samaddar (1999:41) a question of rights that ignores the gender dimension of forced migration is woefully inadequate. Our research on diverse group of displaced women shows that the conventional demarcations between economic migrant and political refugee are inadequate to explain their experiences. In order to bring about positive social change, a holistic understanding of forced migration needs to be developed. For it is only by exploring the extent to which women share common issues and experiences, regardless of the separate bureaucratic categories in which they have been classified, and then by examining the ways in which these experiences are related to broader economic, political and social structures that policies which adequately address the needs of displaced women and children can begin to be imagined.

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